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## SPRING OBSERVATIONS

A winter without excessively low temperatures and pronounced extremes assures spring blossom displays on many trees and shrubs seen at no other time. This proved true of the winter of 1959-60 as evidenced by the following observations.

The Dahurian Rhododendron, *Rhododendron mucronulatum* (syn. *dauricum*), is one of these plants, a dainty, fragile petalled beauty from North China, Manchuria, Korea and Japan, with purplish lilac flowers gracefully poised on slender, light tan stems. The largest Arboretum specimen, a plant six feet tall and almost five across made a splendid showing in late April (full bloom April 25) in Sargents Glade where pale yellow narcissus provided a harmonious ground cover beneath it. Had there been one of the light colored forsythias near by, such as the Primrose Border Forsythia, *Forsythia intermedia primulina*, the effect would have been even lovelier.

Reginald Farrer's sweetly perfumed Fragrant Viburnum, *Viburnum fragrans*, which he discovered in 1914 along the Kansu-Thibet border of North China is the earliest of the genus to flower (E-Mid April) and one of the most profuse. That is, providing its flower buds have not been injured during the winter by excessive cold. The type species grows into a bush eight feet tall with gracefully arching branches covered before the leaves appear with clusters of tubular soft pink flowers. The buds are deeper colored. Attractive, deeply veined foliage tinged bronze as it unfolds, furnishes another interest. There is a white flowered variety, too, *Viburnum fragrans album*, a more erect bush with full clusters of white flowers reminiscent of forced white lilac. Their fragrance is that of heliotrope. It reached full bloom this year on April 27, making a fine showing. In view of the tenderness of the flower buds a sheltered planting site is recommended for both. Procurement may present a problem, for although introduced into the U.S. in 1910 only a few nurseries offer plants.

Japanese Cherries, with a few exceptions, are not for this part of the midwest. And, when we have blossoms on the Autumn Higan Cherry, *Prunus subhirtella autumnalis*, we know the preceding winter has not

been too severe. This often twice blooming, multiple branched small tree (to 15 ft.) is graceful in shape and slender branched with dainty, blush tinged semi-double white flowers (1" diam.) on long, slender, drooping pedicels. In the bud stage they are a pretty soft pink. While the major floral showing is usually in mid-April, this variety will under ideal conditions bloom again in the fall (September). Small, sharply serrate medium green leaves give the tree a fine textured appearance. It was first cultivated in Japan and introduced into the U.S. sometime before 1909.

The hardiest and most dependable of the Japanese Cherries here is the Sargent Cherry, *Prunus sargentii*, a tall (to 45 ft.), vigorous species introduced from Japan by the Arnold Arboretum in 1910. If grown for no other reason than the reddish bronze new foliage appearing after the blossoms, it would be worth having, the color adding zest to spring's multiplicity of greens. This does not mean the flowers should be belittled, however, for they are of good size (1¼" diam.), single deep pink in color and generously produced. The buds are darker. In habit of growth the tree is generally upright with an eventual broad rounded top. Its lustrous brown cherry-like bark is typical of the genus, though the very showy reddish autumnal foliage change is both unusual and colorful.

One and a half inch diameter double white flowers are typical of still another ornamental *Prunus*, *P. avium plena*, the Double Flowered Mazzard Cherry, an erect branched oval pyramidal tree prominent in the current blossom picture. The narrow petalled, pompom-like blooms suggest Flowering Almond both in size and shape, though they are borne several to a cluster on rather stout, semi-drooping pedicels. The leaves which open with the flowers are light green and have sharply toothed edges.

Immense blossoms and a pronounced fragrance elusive of description are characteristic of a comparatively new *Magnolia* blooming well for the first time this spring. This is *M. soulangeana* 'Grace McDade', a variety introduced in 1945 by C. McDade, nurseryman of Semmes, Alabama. And, in spite of its Gulf Coast origin it has proved quite hardy at the Arboretum. With oval petalled flowers up to nine inches across, white marked rose pink at the base on the outside of the petals, they present quite a spectacular sight on the still leafless branches. One blossom will scent an entire room.

Another *Magnolia soulangeana* variety whose ornamental qualifications are too little known is the older form, 'Alexandrina', a French introduction dating back to 1831. Not as large in flower as 'Grace McDade', but earlier blooming and brighter, it provides an interesting variation from the type. The nine petalled flowers are about two inches across at the widest point and up to three and a half or four inches in length, more pointed than those of "*soulangeana*" and considerably more colorful. On the outside the petals are purplish rose or plum colored, on the inner pure white, with a slight trace of rose at the base. When the blooms are fully expanded this contrast is most striking. Comparable to the Saucer *Magnolia* in size and vigor and quite as floriferous, it is a tree any magnolia enthusiast would enjoy having.



Although the Yulan Magnolia, *M. denudata*, was described in a fairly recent bulletin, after another very successful blossoming season, we feel it deserves having further attention called to it. In full bloom on April 23, we were again impressed by the beauty of its thick textured, cupped flowers of waxy white, by their abundance and pleasing fragrance. Excessively high temperatures shortened the Yulan's period of effectiveness considerably, but the display was sufficiently generous to leave a lasting impression.

Only following mild winters do most Forsythias in the Arboretum collection bloom in the profuse manner characteristic of the genus. One exception, the Early Forsythia, *F. ovata*, from Korea, has been more dependable from the standpoint of regularity of bloom, but undistinguished as regards the size and abundance of its flowers. We have consequently watched with considerable interest the performance of a so called variety of this Goldenbell imported from the F. J. Grootendorst & Sons Nursery of Boskoop, Holland in 1950 under the name *Forsythia ovata robusta*. The name is well chosen, for its flowers are very large (some 2 inches across) and its prolificacy of bloom a great improvement over that of the type plant. The Grootendorst catalog mentions nothing of its background, describing it merely as, "a stronger grower with very early primrose yellow flowers".

A Forsythia with white flowers! This is the usual impression of those seeing a blossoming Korean Abelialeaf, *Abeliophyllum distichum*, for the first time. For, the dense clusters of small white flowers lining the shrubs' slender branches do resemble Forsythias, though smaller and sweeter scented with the fragrance of wild plum. While the Korean Abelialeaf blossoms with surprising regularity at the Arboretum, its floral efforts are more generous after mild winters. It was in good bloom by April 18. In addition to the precocious flowers, a word should be said about its autumnal foliage coloring, too, the leaves assuming scarlet, gold and purplish tints.

Although not one of those shrubs whose flowering necessarily indicates a mild winter, *Viburnum juddi* (*carlesi* x *bitchuense*) is worth bringing to notice as a first class viburnum resembling "*carlesi*" in habit, but a better grower with larger blossom clusters composed of longer tubed flowers. They are deeper pink in bud, very shiny and open into flowers just as fragrant as those of the Korean parent. In this respect they are superior to the Burkwood Viburnum, *Viburnum burkwoodi*, whose foliage is a better green and whose growth habit more erect.

E. L. Kammerer

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*Magnolia soulangeana* Soul. 'Grace McDade', late blooming variety with exceptionally large sweet scented flowers.